



Two Decades of Substance Abuse in Northern India: A Chronological and Epidemiological Analysis

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Abstract

Introduction: Substance abuse has emerged as a major public health challenge in India, Punjab is traditionally viewed as the epicenter of India's drug crisis, recent data reveal that Uttar Pradesh bears a comparably heavy or even greater burden in several categories, particularly among youth and adolescents.

Objective: To examine the chronological and epidemiological trends of substance abuse in India over the past two decades (2005–2025), with special reference to Patiala (Punjab) and Muzaffarnagar (Uttar Pradesh).

Methodology: This study employed a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary data collected from peer-reviewed studies, national surveys (AIIMS, NIMHANS, NDDTC), WHO/UNODC reports, and government publications spanning 2005–2025. The data were screened for relevance to northern India, with emphasis on rural and urban sub-sites in Patiala and Muzaffarnagar. Data were synthesized through thematic and chronological analysis, supported by tabular and graphical representation of key findings.

Results: Substance use has risen steadily, with a shift from traditional drugs (alcohol, opium, cannabis) to synthetic opioids and inhalants. Punjab shows higher opioid dependence, while Uttar Pradesh records greater alcohol and inhalant use. Rural areas favor traditional substances; urban centers report increased use of synthetic and pharmaceutical drugs.

Conclusion: Substance abuse in northern India is a multifaceted epidemiological and socio-economic issue requiring multidisciplinary interventions. Comparative analysis of Patiala and Muzaffarnagar highlights that effective policy responses must be region-sensitive, evidence-based, and community-driven to curb the growing burden of substance dependence.

Keywords: Substance Abuse; Epidemiology; Northern India; Punjab Patiala; Muzaffarnagar Uttar Pradesh; Opioids; Inhalants; Multidisciplinary Intervention.

Access this Article Online	Quick Response Code: 
Website: http://heb-nic.in/jrim	
Received on 9/11/2025	
Accepted on 26/11/2025 © HEB All rights reserved	